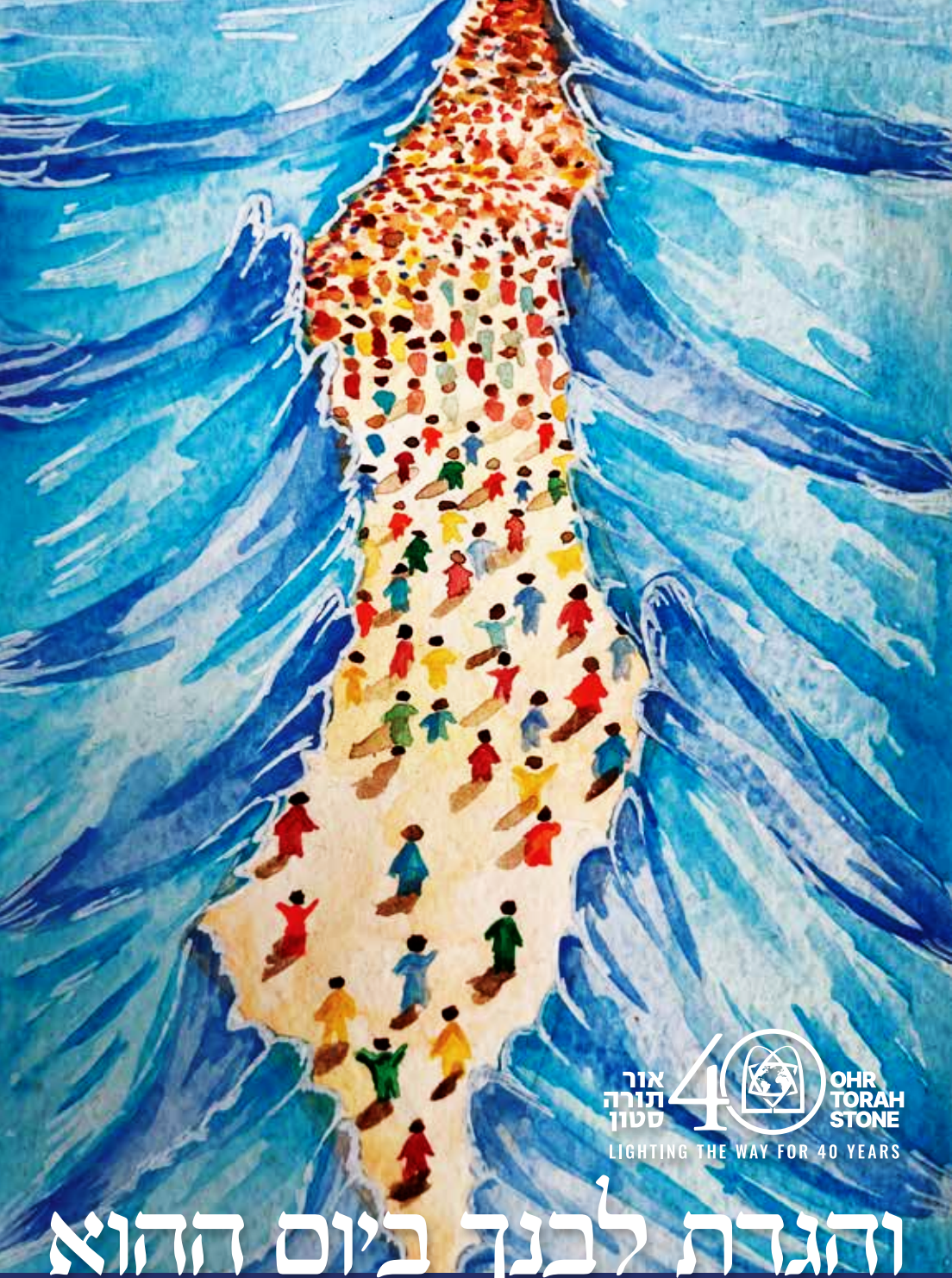

אור תורה סטון
OHR TORAH STONE
LIGHTING THE WAY FOR 40 YEARS

והגדת לבנך ביום ההוא

Ideas for Discussion at Your Seder Table

PESACH 2025/5785

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Yetziyat Mitzrayam, Splitting of the Sea (2025)
Eliora Englanoff, 10th-grader in the **Ann Moranis Belsky Program for the Arts**, **Katz Oriya High School for Girls**, Gush Etzion

The photos in this Seder Companion are taken from OTS programs.

OHR TORAH STONE PRESENTS:

Ideas for Discussion at Your Seder Table

We approach this year's Seder night with a dichotomy of feelings. On the one hand, we continue to reel from the horrors of the October 7th massacre and the ensuing war, as well as unprecedented levels of antisemitism on streets and campuses around the world. On the other hand, we have never felt such unity and support amongst the Jewish people.

Tonight is a time for us to come together as families and friends: to learn what our Torah sources have to say about today's extraordinary challenges and opportunities, and to share our own complex thoughts and feelings.

This Ohr Torah Stone (OTS) Seder Companion was created to stimulate these discussions.

Each Dvar Torah concludes with questions to ponder:

intended for elementary school-aged children

designed for teenagers

directed at young adults

Written by members of the OTS family, we trust that these ideas and questions will keep everyone engaged.

From our table to yours – we wish you a meaningful and enjoyable Seder.

Chag Sameach!

The Seder's Eternal Message

Rabbi Dr. Katriel (Kenneth) Brander

"Our challenge for this Pesach is to make space for both heartbreak and hope"

The mishna in Masekhet Pesachim (10:4) presents the framing through which we are commanded to retell the story of the Exodus: *"Matchil bignut, umisayem bishevach* – We begin with shame, and end with praise."

From here we learn that in order to fulfill the mitzva of *Sippur Yetziat Mitzrayim*, telling the story of our release from bondage in Egypt, we must begin by recounting the servitude itself, and only then make our way towards redemption.

This framing, making space for both the suffering and the salvation, plays out in the dual symbolism of the food items on the Seder table.

The matza we eat is presented twice in the "Maggid" ("recounting the story") section of the Haggadah: first in "*Ha lachma anya* – The bread of affliction," which we remember was eaten by our ancestors while enslaved in Egypt; and then again at the closing of the "Maggid" section, where the matza celebrates redemption, reminding us of our departure from Egypt with no time to allow our dough to rise.

The same goes for the maror, the bitter herbs. The mishna (Pesachim 10:5), cited in the Haggadah, attributes the maror to the bitterness of slavery (Shemot 1:14), yet Rav Chaim ibn Attar, in his masterful commentary *Orach Chayim* (Shemot 12:8), adds an additional symbolic paradigm to this food stuff. He sees maror as a way to accentuate the taste of the *Korban Pesach* (Passover Sacrifice) eaten as a redeemed people.

והגדת
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So, too, for the four cups of wine. On the one hand, they are traditionally associated with the four kinds of redemption from Egypt. On the other hand, the Shulchan Arukh (*Orach Chayim* 472:11) notes a preference for red wine, in memory of the blood of the Jewish children spilled by Pharaoh as he had them cast into the Nile.

Even the sweet charoset, according to Gemara Pesachim (116a), holds within it a duality of meaning, directing our memory both to the fragrant apple orchards, in which Jewish women would secretly birth their children in the belief of a brighter future, and to the thick mortar the Jewish slaves would prepare and use during their backbreaking labor.

Each one of these symbols contains conflicting paradigmatic symbols, one of *genut/avdut* (shame/slavery) and one of *shevach/geula* (praise/redemption). The matza, maror, wine, and charoset simultaneously represent the tragedy and the relief, the pain and the healing, the grief and the hope. Unlike the telling of the story, which follows a clear chronological trajectory, the symbols on our Seder table stand before us as a reflection of a dialectic throughout the night.

This intermixing of suffering and redemption is especially poignant this year. We celebrate our people, our state, the heroism seen all around us, and our unbreakable dedication to our future, without losing sight of all that remains broken: the empty chairs at so many tables, the unbearable sacrifices, and the ongoing challenges facing our people.

The Seder's Eternal Message (*continued*)

These feelings are not in opposition to one another; rather, they are complementary – the story of our people, throughout history and in this moment, holds within it both of these poles.

We are simultaneously a redeemed people and a people in a state of challenge, with both Eliyahu the prophet and the angel of destruction knocking on our door together on Seder night. This tension is at the heart of Jewish existence – our ability to hold both grief and faith, both suffering and redemption, in the same moment.

Our challenge for this Pesach is not to lose sight of either, making space for both heartbreak and hope, praying that it won't be long before we "sing a new song upon our salvation." This is the essence of "*Vehigadeta l'vincha bayom hahu*" – that in every era, no matter how much the world changes, the message of the Haggadah remains relevant. We will bring all this grief with us into Pesach this year, as we reminisce about marching out of Egypt and renew our faith in our ultimate redemption.

Rabbi Dr. Kenneth Brander is President and Rosh HaYeshiva of **Ohr Torah Stone**.

Keeping the Family Together

Rabbi Dr. Shlomo Riskin

מה
העבודה
הזאת
לכם

The Haggadah is not only a historical text; it is also a masterful guide to the art of effectively parenting – communicating the message of our *mesora* (tradition). Our children must feel that they are the prime focus of the evening, and not mere adjuncts to an adult happening; and the message must be molded in such a way as to respond to their questions and concerns. Indeed, the section of "Maggid," telling the story, begins with the famous "Four Questions." Each individual must be given the opportunity to ask their questions and to receive answers appropriate to them.

But what of the apathetic, uninterested, or even belligerent child – depicted in the Haggadah as the "wicked child"? The Haggadah's answer to their seemingly innocent question –"What is this service [*avoda*] to you?" – seems unduly harsh. "'What is this service to you' – and not to him. And because he took himself out of the historic Jewish community, he denied the basic principle. And so you must set his teeth on edge [*hak'heh et shinav*], and tell him, 'It is because of this [ritual] that God did for me [so many wonders] in taking me out of Egypt.' 'God did for me' and not for him! Had he been there, he would not have been redeemed."

The seemingly abrasive response of the Haggadah seems to be the very opposite of everything we've been positing: Set his teeth on edge! Does this mean (God forbid) rap him in the mouth? And why switch

Keeping the Family Together (*continued*)

"The most fundamental message of the Seder is to be inclusive... to make everyone feel wanted and accepted"

from second person to third person in the middle of the dialogue?

I believe that the most fundamental message of the Seder – indeed, of family dynamics, of classroom management, and of national policy as well – is to be inclusive and not exclusive, to make everyone feel wanted and accepted, rather than rejected or merely tolerated.

Indeed, it is in the context of the response to the wicked child that the Haggadah teaches that the most basic principle of our faith is to include oneself – as well as everyone who can possibly be included – within the historical community of Israel, to be part of the eternal chain of Jewish being, to be a member of the family.

Therefore, the problem with this child's question is not his or her search for relevance; that is to be applauded and deserves a proper response. The problem is that they have excluded themselves from the event: they see it as applying to "you" and not to "them."

The author of the Haggadah tells us that, when confronted by children who exclude themselves from the family ritual, to *hak'heh* their teeth; not the familiar Hebrew form *hakeh*, which means to strike or hit, but rather the unusual Hebrew *hak'heh*, which means to blunt or remove the sharpness by means of the warmth of fire.

Tell them, says the Haggadah, that although we are living thousands of the years after the fact, it is as if God took us all out of Egypt, because we are all one historic family, united by our family celebrations and traditions.

However, don't tell it to them matter-of-factly by rote or harshly with animus. Tell it to them with the flame and passion of fire that blunts sharp iron, with the warmth and love of a family that is claiming and welcoming its own as one who belongs – no matter what. Encourage the child to take part in and feel a part of the familial-national celebration. Then, but only then, will the child feel redeemed.

And why the switch from second person to third person? Perhaps the child asked this question, and left the table. They spoke and ran, leaving you no choice but to address them as a third person no longer in your presence. What do you do then? I would suggest that when we open the door for Elijah, it is not in order to let the prophet in. After all, anyone who can visit every Jewish Seder more or less simultaneously will not be obstructed by a closed door.

I believe that we open the door in order for us to go out to find the "wicked child," and lovingly restore him or her to the family Seder table. This is the greatest challenge of Seder night.

Rabbi Shlomo Riskin is the Founder and Rosh HaYeshiva of **Ohr Torah Stone**.

Unity Saves Lives

Rabbanit Hila Naor

The "Maggid' section of the Haggadah opens with an invitation to "everyone who is hungry, come and eat; everyone in need, come and celebrate Pesach with us."

This is essentially a call for unity. A call for solidarity. At this very moment, the Jewish people are whole, they are one.

Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik points out that slavery was not uniform; there were different levels (for example, according to our Sages, the tribe of Levi was not enslaved at all). Nevertheless, each person saw the pain of the other. Each person knew well how the person standing in front of them felt. This is a relationship of unity, a connection that brings redemption.

The "*Ha lachma anya*" call is not only for a person who is physically hungry. It is also a call to a person who may have plenty of food, but is lonely and has no one to celebrate Seder night with. We tell them: "Whoever is in need, come and celebrate Pesach" – come and join us, do not be alone.

הא לחמא עניא

During these exceptionally difficult times for the Jewish people – in Israel and around the world – we need to be more compassionate and pay extra attention to each other's needs, be they physical or emotional. Unity saves people in more ways than we know. Unity is not just a slogan; it is a way of life.

Questions for Discussion:

Do you ever encounter anyone who seems lonely? How can you help?

What does unity mean today for the Jewish people around the world? In Israel?

Every day in prayer, in reciting the *Shema*, we remember the Exodus from Egypt. What is so special about telling this same story on Seder night?

Rabbanit Hila Naor is the Director of **Ma'aminot BeMadim**: an Ohr Torah Stone institution designed to answer the *halakhic*, spiritual, and practical needs of religious women serving in the IDF. These women include hundreds of alumnae of the **Pava Hadas Army Program for Women** at our three **Midreshet Lindenbaum** branches – in Jerusalem, in Lod, and in Carmiel.

Rabbanit Naor is also the first woman to hold the position of Spiritual Leader in the IDF.

Asking = Connecting

Noa Nagen

The whole Seder, as we are told many times, is set up for the children to ask their parents (or other adults) questions. Whether they are about something on the Seder plate, why we drink four cups of wine, why there are three matzot within a special cover – the children are encouraged to ask, so we can answer them.

The Mishna tells us that if the child present doesn't ask anything, we should encourage him or her by telling them to look around and "spot the difference" between tonight and other nights of the year. "*Ma nishtana* – What's different?" offers a launch pad to a child who is unable to start the conversation.

But why do we need that launch pad at all? After all, we could simply recount the story of the Exodus from Egypt, without any questions whatsoever. If the purpose of the questions is to get the child's attention, you could simply make sure they're listening. Why are the questions themselves important?

When we ask a question, we are inviting ourselves to be part of what is going on around us, and even to change how we view the world. The questions our children ask at Seder night are a kind of declaration: "I am part of the story! I am present! I see this night is different, and that's exactly why I ask questions about it – because it might make a difference to who I am."

מה נשתנה?

The "*Ma nishtana*" questions are an essential way to make sure that we are all present. That we are able to ask about what is actually taking place, here and now, rather than view the event as spectators from the sidelines. "*Ma nishtana*" trains us to stay in the moment, and to realize that we ourselves are part of the eternal story of the People of Israel.

Questions for Discussion:

When was the last time you asked a good question? What was that question? Were you happy with the answer you received?

Have you ever asked anyone something and received an answer that surprised you? How did this discovery affect you and your relationship with that person, or the way you chose to act moving forward?

What questions do you have today about the world we live in? Are they the same as they were a year or two ago, or with hindsight, are you asking them in a different way today?

Noa Nagen and her husband Yeshaya Nussbaum are currently on *shlichut* in Chicago.

Ohr Torah Stone has over 300 *shlichim* and *shlichot* - graduates of the **Beren-Amiel** and **Straus-Amiel Emissary Institutes** – in 97 Jewish communities in over 40 countries worldwide, enhancing Jewish education as well as the Diaspora-Israel connection.

Remembering the Feeling

Rabbi Sarel Rosenblatt

The first holiday in the Hebrew calendar is Pesach. The main event of Pesach is Seder night and its central commandment not only to remember the Exodus from Egypt, but also to tell the story to our children – from when we were slaves on foreign soil, until we were a free people in our own land.

Why is it so important to remember those terrible years of slavery? One could argue that only by remembering a difficult period can we really appreciate the better times. But perhaps a deeper role for that memory is removed entirely from the context of the Exodus from Egypt. Maybe it is for us to remember the years of slavery themselves.

The Torah teaches us to be kind to strangers "since you were strangers in the land of Egypt."

Our experience in Egypt is important to understanding firsthand what it feels like to be a minority in another society, a stranger in a room full of old friends, the "other" in a culture that is difficult to understand. What it feels like to be that "different" group that is being slandered, that is made a scapegoat for all of a nation's misfortunes.

Part of the mission of the Jewish people is to teach the world not only the value of freedom, but also how to behave as a sovereign state. What rights do we afford the "strangers" among us? What

compassion do we show the weaker sectors of our population? How should we treat those whose traditions, looks, or behaviors are different to our own?

In addition to functioning as an independent country vis-à-vis the outside world, the success and future of the State of Israel is inextricably tied to our sensitivity and respect towards every sector of society.

Questions for Discussion

Think about a time in your life that you felt misunderstood or not heard. What can you learn from that time, that might make you more sympathetic to others?

The mistreatment of the Israelites ultimately led to the downfall of ancient Egypt – one of the most powerful nations in history. Can you name other societies or empires that followed a similar fate? What common factors do they have?

Two different stories are related in the Haggadah. One starts with "We were slaves to Pharaoh in Egypt" and the other with "Our ancestors were once worshippers of idols." What different perspectives do these two stories give to us as a people?

Rabbi Sarel Rosenblatt is the Rosh Yeshiva of the **Robert. M. Beren Machanaim Hesder Yeshiva**, and former Rosh Kollel of the **Joseph and Gwendolyn Straus Rabbinical Seminary**.

Beren Machanaim and the Straus Rabbinical Seminary are two of Ohr Torah Stone's seven post-high school Institutions that combine intensive Torah study with full service in the Israel Defense Forces.

Leadership in Times of Crisis

Yuval Farjun

The story of the Five Rabbis on Seder night is not mentioned anywhere else in the Talmud (although it is quoted by both *Geonim* and *Rishonim*). These were the great scholars of the generation that followed the destruction of the Second Beit Hamikdash – the Holy Temple in Jerusalem. This gathering is strange, because each of them had their own Beit Midrash (Study Hall), and we would expect that for the Pesach Seder, they would be sitting there with their students (and/or family members).

Some explain this gathering as an underground, secret meeting of the leaders of the generation to discuss organizing a major uprising against the Romans – what came to be known as the Bar Kokhba Revolt.

After the Temple was destroyed, the Romans continued to oppress the Jews in the Land of Israel, and planned to build a pagan city in Jerusalem. The Jewish leaders could not accept this idea and decided to rebel. Rabbi Akiva's Beit Midrash was in Bnei Brak (in today's central Israel, near Tel Aviv), and there he invited the scholars to plan the rebellion under the guise of gathering for Seder night. At this meeting, the scholars discussed the "Exodus from Egypt" as a code name for the redemption of Israel.

The words they spoke all "that night" alludes to the dark culture of Rome and the troubles that had befallen the people of Israel. While they were talking

and talking, their young, energetic students, who dreamed of redemption, approached them and said to them, "Our rabbis, the time has come for the morning *Shema*" – It is time for Hashem to illuminate the world with the light of redemption.

Tradition says that the Bar Kokhba Revolt did indeed break out on Seder night. Though it ultimately failed, it became an inspiration for many generations of Jews suffering the darkness of exile, as well as their continued faith in a speedy and unexpected redemption – "for behold, it is day!"

Yuval Farjun is Principal of the **Jacob Sapirstein "Ariel" Junior High and High School for Boys in Ramot** in Jerusalem – one of six Ohr Torah Stone high schools in Israel – that excels in Torah learning, academic studies, and community service.

Questions for Discussion

- Have you ever had a time when things didn't work out the way you planned? What did you try to do to change the situation?
- There's a popular saying: "It's always darkest before the dawn." What do you think this means? Can you give an example of this idea at another time in history?
- The idea of leadership in difficult times is central to this story. What world leaders have inspired you the most? Why?

Four Stages of Life

Rabbi Dr. Yakov Nagen

Questions are the foundation of growth. A question opens the asker to new knowledge, ideas, and perspectives, which, with an open mind, can even lead to a willingness to change one's previously held conceptions. Questions also serve as tools that drive the search for knowledge and discovery – and the furtherment of human development in every sphere of life.

The four sons (or children) mentioned as asking questions in the Haggadah – the wise, the wicked, the simple, and the one who is unable to ask – represent four different archetypes in Jewish tradition. However, if we reverse the order in which they appear, they can also be seen as four stages in a person's life.

Young infants have no ability to ask, and no drive even to do so. As such, they remain passive, fully reliant on whoever is caring for them and absorbing the actions, and reactions, of their environment. As children become more independent beings, their curiosity starts to appear in spoken form. Now they know how to ask, but in their innocence, they are willing to accept simplistic answers.

As we mature further, and our worlds expand, teenagers often scorn those who still believe in the explanations they once received – explanations that now seem shallow. Taken to the extreme, this can cause a loss of faith in the society in which we were

raised – refusing to listen to or accept anything from those who, in our eyes, have betrayed our trust.

As we venture into adulthood, however, we start to understand that nothing is as "black and white" as it seemed. We reach a level of maturity where we see the world in shades, more complex and nuanced than we once believed it to be. We understand that while we may not always have all the answers, this does not mean there is nothing left to ask. In fact, in continuing to ask questions, we can learn so much more – even from those whom we may have previously dismissed.

Questions for Discussion:

Who would you most like to ask a question to? What would that question be?

Did you ever ask a question that you felt wasn't properly answered? How did that make you feel?

Have you ever learned something valuable from someone you had previously dismissed?

Rabbi Dr. Yakov Nagen is the Director of the **Blickle Institute for Interfaith Dialogue**.

The Blickle Institute is part of the **Ohr Torah Interfaith Center** – an Ohr Torah Stone institution that seeks to make religion part of the solution to the many challenges society faces today.

Preserving Our Identity

Rabbi Bar-On Dasberg

"*Vehi she'amda la'avoteynu velanu* – In every generation, they have risen up against us." This single phrase in the Haggadah encapsulates the answer to two of the greatest mysteries in Jewish history.

The first is the enigma of the survival of the Jewish people. While all the ancient nations of the Middle East and Europe assimilated and disappeared, the People of Israel, who were in the most difficult situation – far from their land and scattered among the nations – survived as a people. How did this happen?

The second is the riddle of antisemitism. This inexplicable scourge on humanity has pursued Jews in every culture, regardless of their religious affinity, socioeconomic status, national allegiance, or any other distinguishing factor. Why is this so?

It seems that the answer to these mysteries is to rephrase the question. Instead of asking "how" or "why?", we should ask "for what purpose?"

The French philosopher Jean-Paul Sartre wrote in his book *Anti-Semite and Jew*: "Antisemitism makes the Jew who he is" – a troubling sentence, particularly as it was written so soon after the Holocaust. Based on this statement, there are those who somewhat disturblingly claim that "antisemitism is bad for the Jews, but good for Judaism."

This idea was expressed by the Netziv of Volozhin as early as the nineteenth century. He explains "*Vehi*

she'amda" as follows: The fact there has always been someone who wished to destroy us is actually what preserved us as a people (*Meshiv Davar* 1:40).

This seems like a very grim conclusion. Are we destined forever to live under hatred in order to preserve our national identity?

To this, the Netziv gives us an alternative: If we preserve our Jewish identity, if we persist in our national mission to perfect the world and be a light unto the nations, then there will be no need for the dreadful instrument of antisemitism in order to ensure our survival.

Questions for Discussion

What do you think is the "secret" of the Jewish people? How has our people managed to survive for thousands of years?

What can each of us do to help Jews around the world connect with their Jewish identity in a positive way, and not through antisemitism and hatred?

Does the phrase "antisemitism is bad for Jews, but good for Judaism" make sense to you? Why?

Rabbi Bar-On Dasberg is the Rav of the **Katz Oriya High School for Girls** in Gush Etzion – one of six Ohr Torah Stone high schools in Israel – that excels in tailor-made academic, arts, and volunteer tracks.

Coming Home

Rabbi Shay Nave

The mishna at the end of Tractate Pesachim states that the main content of the "Maggid" section of the Haggadah is the five-verse statement that a Jewish farmer was instructed to say on bringing his first fruits to the Temple in Jerusalem:

> "An Aramean deceived my father (Jacob), who went down from Egypt and lived there with his few offspring, and there they became a nation, great, mighty and numerous: And the Egyptians oppressed us and afflicted us and laid upon us hard labor: And we cried out to Hashem, the God of our fathers, and Hashem heard our voice and saw our affliction and our labor and our oppression: And Hashem brought us out of Egypt with a strong hand and with an outstretched arm, and with great signs and wonders: And **He brought us into this place and gave us this Land**, a land flowing with milk and honey." (Devarim/Deuteronomy, chapter 26)

The "Maggid" section of our Haggadah today – in all its many variations – contains explanations on the first four verses of this statement. Yet, for some reason, the explanation on the fifth verse, "And He brought us into this place and gave us this Land," is missing. How could this have happened?

ארמי אבד אבי

Perhaps at some point during our 2,000-year exile from our homeland we stopped talking about that fifth verse. After all, you cannot live in Poland, Spain, or even the United States and say "And He gave us this Land." Nevertheless, today, the largest population of Jews is found in the Land of Israel. I believe that we can, and must, go back to talking about the fifth verse of the first fruits statement, and even introduce explanations about it back into the Haggadah. Only after that should the "Maggid" conclude with "Dayanu," a song of praise and joy that ends with us entering our Promised Land – Eretz Yisrael.

Questions for Discussion

When you go away to stay at friends, on vacation, or to camp, it can be fun. But many kids complain about feeling "homesick." What is it about home that you miss most of all?

What are the special mitzvot that can only be practiced in the Land of Israel?

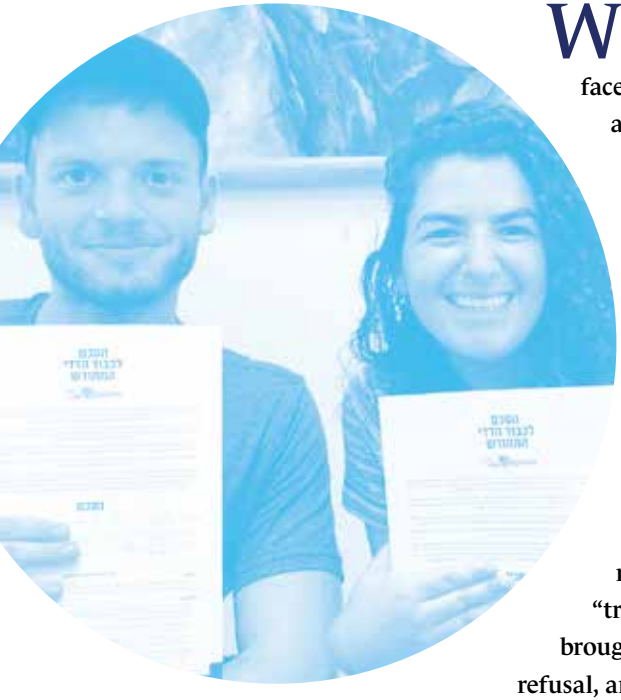
Do you think Israelis take it for granted that they live in the "Promised Land"? How might that have changed over the past year and a half?

Rabbi Shay Nave is Director of the **Monique and Mordecai Katz Yachad Program for Jewish Unity and Community**.

Through the Katz Yachad Program, Ohr Torah Stone brings together Israeli Jews from across the religious, cultural, and political spectrums to bridge societal divides and strengthen Israeli unity against the backdrop of our shared heritage.

Exercising Free Will

Tirtza Karniel



Why did Pharaoh keep refusing to set the Jewish people free, even in the face of unprecedented hardships on him and his people?

Pharaoh's intransigence caused untold misery to him and his entire nation. Despite God's devastating plagues, he "hardened his heart" over and over, and refused to let the Israelites go.

Well, not exactly. During the first five plagues, we read that Pharaoh hardens his own heart – likely in the belief that he and his nation could not be beaten by the "troubles" Moses (and his God) had brought upon them. The obstinacy, the refusal, and the intransigence were all his. However, from the sixth plague on, it is God that hardens Pharaoh's heart.

If this is true, how can we blame Pharaoh for not letting the Israelites go? He had no choice in the matter. It was God's doing, not his. That he and his people should be punished seems to flout the fundamental principle of justice, that we are guilty only for what we have freely chosen to do.

Our Sages offer an explanation that turns this idea on its head. God hardened Pharaoh's heart precisely to restore his free will. After the succession of plagues that had devastated the land, Pharaoh was under overwhelming pressure to let the Israelites go. Had he done so, it would not have been out of free will, but rather under *force majeure* – he had no choice left. God therefore strengthened Pharaoh's heart so that even after the first five plagues he was genuinely free to choose what his heart really desired.

Questions for Discussion:

Why do you think Pharaoh really didn't want to let the Israelites go, despite all the plagues God brought on the Egyptians?

What makes someone "blind" to the suffering of others?

How important is free will in making decisions in your life? What other factors would influence these decisions?

Tirtza Karniel is a social worker at **Yad La'isha: The Monica Dennis Goldberg Legal Aid Center and Hotline**, which provides legal, emotional, and financial support to *agunot* – women whose husbands are unwilling or unable to grant them a Jewish divorce.

Through Yad La'isha, Ohr Torah Stone has set thousands of women free from the chains of an unwanted marriage and helped them rebuild their shattered lives.

Yad La'isha also encourages engaged couples to sign a Halakhic Prenuptial Agreement – the most effective way to prevent women from becoming future *agunot*.

Say It Out Loud

Rabbi Nechemia Krakower

"Rabban Gamliel would say: Whoever did not say these three things did not fulfill their obligation: Pesach, matza, and maror."

If Rabban Gamliel had written "Whoever did not *do* these three things…" we would understand this statement. Pesach, matza, and maror are the three components of the unique mitzva of Pesach: eating the Passover Sacrifice with matza and maror.

So what did he mean when he said "Whoever did not *say*"? Is it necessary to actually say something about these three ingredients, in addition to eating them?

Perhaps he is telling us that the act of eating the Pesach, matza, and maror should make us think about what they represent – and that insight should be said out loud.

"**Pesach**" – the sacrifice we were instructed to make on the eve of *Yetziat Mitzrayim* as well as in Temple times – signifies redemption, a brighter future to which we all aspire.

"**Matza**" signifies our role as humble messengers of Hashem, who seek to fulfill His commandments and bring His name to the world.

"**Maror**" signifies the painful trials we have to go through in order to achieve the Final Redemption.

פסח, מצה, ומרור

All three are crucial for the Jewish people: It is impossible to aspire to a brighter future without remembering a challenging past; it is intolerable to remain buried in a bitter past with no hope for tomorrow; and it is unfeasible to connect the past with the future without a clear mandate of the path we need to take.

The destiny of the people of Israel is to weave a thread between our difficult past and a golden future by modeling exactly how to get there: by following Hashem's commandments and being a light unto all the nations of the world.

Rabbi Nechemia Krakower is Director of the **Hosen Program for Mental Health and Resilience**, which is helping hundreds of Ohr Torah Stone students, alumni, and faculty cope with emotional trauma and crisis brought on by the October 7th massacre and its aftermath.

Questions for Discussion

What does it mean to be "humble"? Why do you think that characteristic is signified by matza?

Have you ever experienced something that fell apart in order for something new to be "born"?

Does a better future always have to be based on difficult experiences? Is this a necessary process, or could it come about in a different way?

Keeping Faith in Difficult Times

Rabbanit Rachel Weber Leshaw

The mitzva of maror has changed over time. It was originally eaten as a "condiment" of the *Korban Pesach* – the Passover Sacrifice that we were instructed to eat on the eve of our redemption from Egypt, together with matza. This practice continued in the Land of Israel during Temple times. However, after the destruction of the Second Temple, our Sages transformed eating maror to a standalone mitzva with its own blessing.

In a famous mishna quoted in our Haggadah, Rabban Gamliel gives us our first explanation as to why we continue to eat maror despite not being able to bring the *Korban Pesach*. *"Al shum sh**maror**u hamiztriyim et chayei avoteinu bemitzrayim* – because the Egyptians made our ancestors' lives bitter." Maror emphasizes the period of slavery, the suffering we endured under the Egyptians before the redemption.

However, the three components of the *Korban Pesach* mentioned in our Haggadah – Pesach (the sacrificed meat), matza, and maror – seem to be in the wrong chronological order. If maror represents slavery, why is it last on the list? Shouldn't it be first, as we move from slavery to freedom?

The answer might be that eating maror doesn't just remind us of the period of slavery in Egypt; it also represents all of the difficult times the Jewish people have faced throughout history.

מרור

Tonight, when we eat our maror, during a time of terrible trials for the Jewish nation, we can sadly only too easily connect to that idea. But it is also important to believe that, just like during ancient Egyptian times, God will ultimately redeem us. One day, with God's help, we will merit to eat the *Korban Pesach* in Jerusalem again together with matza and maror – but until then we'll continue to eat maror on its own, and have faith that redemption may be just around the corner.

Questions for Discussion

Can you think of a meal you like, but wouldn't want to eat one of the ingredients on its own? What kind of tastes do we enjoy along with something else, but not by themselves?

The Seder swings back and forth between slavery and freedom, symbolized by maror and matza. What periods during Jewish history would have emphasized matza more at their Seder, and when do you think maror played a larger role? Where do you see this year on that spectrum?

Why do we eat matza and maror together during the "Korekh" section of the Haggadah, if we've already eaten them on their own?

Rabbanit Rachel Weber Leshaw teaches Gemara and Halakha at **Midreshet Lindenbaum's Maria and Joel Finkle Overseas Program**.

One of Ohr Torah Stone's seven post-high school institutions, Midreshet Lindenbaum offers this transformative gap-year program for young women from abroad to deepen their love and knowledge of Torah, the Jewish people, and the Land of Israel.

Challenges and Gratitude

Rabbanit Chamutal Shoval

We usually say Hallel – the prayer of gratitude – during the day. Once a year, on Seder night, we say Hallel after nightfall. Nighttime usually symbolizes uncertainty, fear, and struggles. So why tonight, of all nights, are we saying Hallel?

On all other Jewish holidays, we say the Hallel prayer in order to acknowledge the miracles that happened to the people of Israel at that time. But the Jewish people was created not only from miracles. They formed a resilient nation also based on the difficulties they went through.

Recent studies show how practicing gratitude – especially at difficult times in our lives – can improve mental wellbeing, reduce stress, and even contribute to enhanced physical health. Comparing gratitude to feelings of entitlement and resentment, it seems that changing our perspective can lead to greater happiness and emotional strength.

Alongside our gratitude for the kindnesses God gives us, we need to acknowledge the difficulties we have gone through and that we are still going through now. In order to build real resilience, we must learn how, despite these struggles, we can still see the good in our lives.

We teach ourselves and our children to say thank you in order to practice gratitude and enhance resilience even when times are rough. The darkness, the fear, can often feel all consuming – but a new dawn will eventually break.

That is why, during Seder night, we are asked to imagine as if we ourselves had come out of Egypt. This is very hard, when we sit in our sparkling homes with our plentiful food. Perhaps the idea is to focus both on the hardships that still endure today, and on the miracles and kindnesses we have nevertheless experienced. Beyond thanking God for redeeming us from Egypt, saying Hallel is an acknowledgment of these daily miracles.

Questions for Discussion:

Who do you maybe take for granted in your everyday life that you could stop to say thank you to? What for?

Is it possible to say thank you for a complex event that has good and bad in it? Can you give an example?

What good can you recognize in our current situation, despite the heart-break and frustration? How does this make you feel towards the future?

Rabbanit Chamutal Shoval is Director of the **Susi Bradfield Women's Institute of Halakhic Leadership** (**WIHL**).

The WIHL and its daughter program, the **International Halakha Scholars Program** (**IHSP**), are two groundbreaking Ohr Torah Stone initiatives that educate and train female spiritual leaders and *halakhic* advisors in all areas of life in Israel and around the world.

What is Your Ultimate Dream?

Binyomin Rosenblum

The Jewish people are always davening for the Beit Hamikdash – the Holy Temple – to be rebuilt and for *Mashiach* (the Messiah) to come. However, only twice a year do we say the words "*L'shana haba'ah b'Yerushalayim ha'binuyah* – Next year in the rebuilt Jerusalem": at the end of Yom Kippur, and on Seder night. If it is true that we always want *Mashiach* to come, why do we only say this on these two nights?

To understand the answer, we must look at the focus of these two holidays. Nowadays the main part of Yom Kippur is the davening in shul for Hashem to forgive our sins and grant us a long and happy life. However, during the times of the Beit Hamikdash, the main focus was the *avoda* – the Temple service – of the Kohen Gadol (High Priest). It is only natural that on this holiest day of the year, we greatly feel the loss of the Beit Hamikdash, since we are missing the main "action" of the day.

On Pesach as well, the loss of the Beit Hamikdash is also deeply felt – for the same reason. The name of our holiday is connected to the *Korban Pesach* – the Passover Sacrifice – which we brought in the times of the Beit Hamikdash. Everyone came to Yerushalayim and ate the *Korban* with their family, as a reminder of the first *Korban Pesach* that the Children of Israel ate right before they left Egypt.

We could ask though, why we add to the word "*b'Yerushalayim*" the adjective "*ha'binuyah*"? Don't we already have a beautiful built-up Jerusalem as our eternal capital of Israel? Maybe this is because while we are remembering how Hashem redeemed us from Egypt, even to this day we are still not fully redeemed. *Yetziat Mitzrayim* was one of the biggest public miracles Hashem performed, but the future, final redemption will be unparalleled in its glory and the peace we all so very much want.

Questions for Discussion:

What is your biggest wish right now? How do you think you can get closer to that dream?

What function did the Beit Hamikdash serve in Temple times? What has replaced that today?

Do you find it easy to wish for the Beit Hamikdash to be rebuilt? What do you imagine might change for Israel if it was? What about for other nations of the world?

Binyomin Rosenblum is a second-year student at the **Elaine and Norm Brodsky Darkaynu Program**.

This Ohr Torah Stone inclusive program offers the only year-in-Israel experience for young Orthodox Jewish adults with special needs – just like their mainstream siblings and peers.

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